

4/6/76

7/6/16

CV009

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

NS 208/76

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Date: 6 September 1976

ATTACK ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ARGENTINA

"Until we can cleanse the teaching area, and professors are all of Christian thought and ideology, we will not achieve the triumph we seek in our struggle against the revolutionary left."

General Vilas - Deputy Commander of V Army Corps
Bahia Blanca, 4 August 1976

act on
democratic
community

Since the coup of 24 March there has been a systematic ideological purge of the academic community in Argentina. A new law - ley de prescindibilidad - passed by the military junta at the end of March, authorises the summary dismissal or suspension from duty of any state employee for unspecified reasons.... According to a recent report in New Scientist (29 July 1976) "Between March and May, more than 2,000 university academics lost their jobs as well as 700 from various research institutes. Members of the Argentine Physical Society estimate that a quarter of this number have lost their jobs." As there have been sweeping dismissals in the field of Psychiatry and in all other sectors of education, there is considerable doubt as to the accuracy of the official statement by the civilian Minister of Education, Ricardo Bruera, that about 3,000 academics, administrators and teaching assistants in national secondary schools had been dismissed since March. (Report New York Times, 5 August 1976)

Some of Argentina's most prestigious scientists have been dismissed or detained; centers most affected include National Science and Technology Research Council, the Physics and Technology Institute at San Miguel, the Atomic Energy Committee, the National Institute of Agriculture and Cattle Breeding Technology. (according to reports from three scientists at the Centro de Investigacion de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politecnico Nacional in Mexico City).

Events at the Atomic Energy Commission

Between 1 - 19 April 1976, the following employees of the Atomic Energy Commission were arrested:

Antonio Misetich: aged 39, former MIT Faculty member Nuclear Scientist.
Maximo Pedro Victoria: aged 34, nuclear physicist
Pedro Landeyro: chemical engineer
Santiago Morazzo: chemist
Carlos Calle: engineer
Luis P. Pereyra-Marcondes: physicist
..... Domi and wife Maria Dipace

Two other non-scientific personnel were also arrested; only the surname of one is known: Vallione. The following report was made by Dr Virgilio Troncoso, brother of Maximo Victoria. "Maximo Pedro Victoria was arrested on 1 April and detained on the "Bahia Aguirre", a boat anchored on the River Plate near Buenos

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release () Excise () Deny

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Aires. He is married with three children and obtained his doctorate in Nuclear Physics at the age of 25. He has worked in the most important institutes in the world, e.g. Laurence Radiation Institute at Berkley University California. He is a member of several national and international scientific associations.

On 1 April he went to work at the Atomic Energy Commission as usual. He was met by a Captain Leibowitz, who told him to go to the Personnel Department of the Commission. Once there, he was beaten up, a hood was placed over his head and he was taken to the boat. His identity papers were taken from him, which is extremely dangerous as this happens to people who disappear for good. The boats are controlled by the military and they would not hesitate to sink them if necessary. During all the time my brother was held captive on the boat, his family were in complete ignorance about his fate. His wife only knew that he had disappeared. Some days afterwards my brother's situation was clarified. We were told that there were no charges against him, that he was under investigation and that he was to be transferred to a prison in Buenos Aires. Fortunately that was done and he is now detained in Villa Devoto."

Antonio Misetich was arrested on 19 April in Buenos Aires; his whereabouts have not been confirmed. It is believed that all the Atomic Energy Commission people are being held in preventive detention under the State of Siege - which in effect means indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial.

INTIMIDATION AND ARREST OF PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PSYCHIATRISTS

of mental facilities?

Recent cuts in subsidies to psychiatric institutions and reductions in medical staff will irreparably damage the mental health system in Argentina (established largely during Onganía's presidency) according to a report in La Opinion on 2 May 1976. In the province of Buenos Aires all the state and municipal hospitals have been affected. The Borda hospital (for men) and the Mavano (for women) in the capital are representative of the extent of the cuts. The Borda had a full-time staff of 120 doctors and psychologists catering for 2,300 inmates and running an out-patients' clinic. In April seven heads of departments were 'suspended' and more than a hundred volunteers dismissed. So now in one ward there is only a doctor and a nurse to look after 180 patients. In the Moyano hospital the ratio is 120 patients to one doctor. The prestigious psychiatric department of the Lanus hospital which taught students from all over Latin America has also suffered badly. The head of the department Dr Valentín Barenblitt, has been 'suspended' and the day center has been closed. The number of beds in the psychopathology and neurology unit has been reduced by 50%. The psychiatric wing of the Avellaneda hospital has been virtually forced to close after the dismissal of 58 doctors.

The division between "traditional" and "progressive" factions in the field of psychiatry has intensified, particularly in the last six months, with many disturbing results. Progressive psychologists have been accused of subverting their patients and of giving 'ideological support' to the guerrillas. [The Argentinian Federation of Psychiatrists was recently suspended after it had voiced concern about the effects of detention on prisoners. The military also appears to associate psychiatry with subversion. Over the past three years, various practitioners have been forced to abandon their jobs or leave the country after receiving death threats from the AAF.]

Case of Claudio Santiago BERMANN.

The following is an extract of a letter received by Amnesty International

from a relative of Claudio Santiago Bermann.

"He was arrested on 27 April, after midnight by an army patrol who searched his house. He is a well-known psychiatrist, devoted to his private practice and the direction of a small family clinic for psychiatric cases in Cordoba. He is 50 years old, and has six children whose ages range from 3 to 26 years old. Before raiding his house, his private office was carefully searched by persons unknown who entered through a window.

"After he was taken from his home, he was apparently held in an old army prison in Cordoba (Campo de la Rivera) which has been functioning again and where many victims of "unofficial" kidnappings are said to have been held. There he was chained to a bench and hooded. After five days he was taken to the Penitenciaría, a prison for those already serving trial sentences and used for political prisoners. When he was being taken into the prison he was seen by one of his patients. The military authorities declined to inform his family about his whereabouts, and they found out where he was through an anonymous call. It was later on that they admitted he was in the Penitenciaría and allowed a notary to see him and have him sign a power of attorney for his wife.

He is completely incommunicado, the Habeas Corpus writs presented on his behalf have not been answered, no charges have been presented against him and he is not even at the disposition of the National Government (disposicion del Poder Ejecutivo Nacional) which is usual under the State of Siege for political prisoners with no formal charges against them. He has not been able to communicate with his family even by writing; they are only allowed to bring him clothes, and of course have not been able to see him. We know of at least one opportunity in which he was taken out of prison to be questioned and we do not know which methods were used.

The Argentine government has been allowing those political prisoners with no charges against them to leave the country once they are granted political asylum by any country. There is a chance he would be allowed to leave the country if there was a country willing to take him."

Events at the University of the South - Bahia Blanca

The New York Times (5 August 1976) reported a military investigation of academic "subversion" in the National University of Bahia Blanca. Seventeen professors have been arrested and the army issued a list of 31 other persons who were wanted (some of these are living abroad). The academics, mainly from the economics faculty, will be tried on charges of organizing subversive instruction. They include the former rector of the university Victor Benamo.

In the present atmosphere, few hold out real hopes that the purges will discontinue nor given the opinion of the military can one be optimistic about the outcome of the trials of academics and students by military courts.

"In the universities, the posts of vice chancellor, dean and even director of studies have been taken over by the military men, who are also in charge of research institutes. Students and staff have to submit to regulations governing political behaviour in their private lives. University libraries have been purged of subversive books. Those of Marx and Freud - branded "ideological criminals" by the new secretary general of the National University of Cordoba, who is an Air Force Officer, have even been publicly burned." New Scientist, 29 July 1976.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM?
[Further insights into the mentality of the new regime were gleaned from the statements made on 16 July by the new rector of the University of Buenos Aires, Senor Alberto Constantini, who regretted that the police could not be removed from the university faculties at present because of the risk of subversion and he added that wherever ideological penetration is present there was no possibility of establishing respect for academic freedom.]

ACTION

Academics and students who wish to help their fellows in detention are asked to:-

1. Write to General Jorge Videla, the President, and the Minister of Education requesting the release of all academics and students held without trial. We suggest that pressure would be most effectively applied if academics and students wrote on behalf of a few individuals.
2. Attempt to find places to offer to dismissed academics in European and American universities and colleges.
3. Write letters to academic and student journals denouncing this attack on academic freedom.
4. Denounce the situation in Argentina at international academic forums.
5. Groups or individuals interested in working on behalf of any of the individuals listed overleaf may contact Amnesty International for further details or suggestions.

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